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KNOWLEDGE *and* PRACTICE
necessary to Happiness.

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S E R M O N

Preached in the

O L D F U R Y,

O N

W E D N E S D A Y, *March* 172 $\frac{7}{8}$,

At the Conclusion of the L E C T U R E for
the last Winter Season.

By S. CHANDLER. ^K

Published at the Request of the MANAGERS.

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OLD

WEDNESDAY

At the Cathedral of the Episcopate for
the last Winter Session.

BY S. CHANDLER.

Published at the Press of the Episcopate.

CONDON

NEW YORK

TO THE
GENTLEMEN

Who support the
WEDNESDAY LECTURE

AT THE
OLD FURT.

GENTLEMEN,

I Here present you, according to your request, with the sermon that concluded my service amongst you, for the past winter season; which I the more readily consented to, as it afforded me an opportunity of gratefully acknowledging my obligations to you, for the generous concern you have shewn for my support, and placing me in a station,

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where,

where, with the blessing of God, I may hope to be more extensively useful than I might otherwise have ever been.

If I had consulted my vanity or ambition, I could never have had a more sensible gratification of it, than by being called to that work, in which by your desire I am now engaged, and in seeing myself attended by an audience, not only numerous beyond expectation, but remarkable for their fortunes, politeness and impartial love and regard to truth, and in being encouraged by such a generous contribution, as I believe hath exceeded every thing of the like nature, that hath been done, either in the Establishment, or amongst the Dissenters.

However, as the design of forming this Lecture was wholly unknown to me, I impute its rise and progress to the kindness and care of Providence, and think I can honestly say that I have no other passion raised in my heart

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heart, from the acceptance I have met with, than gratitude to God and you, and a desire of bringing glory to him, by being instrumental to promote your virtue and happiness.

Thus far all good men will wish me success; and 'tis an addition to my satisfaction that I can assure you, that many of my brethren in the ministry, whose furniture and experience would have better qualified them for such a work, rejoice in your friendship to me, and will have a real share in all the pleasures of my success, without envying me your acceptance, or secretly endeavouring to prevent it. I could not forgive myself on this occasion, should I forget to mention the generous carriage of my *Reverend Pastor* Mr. LEAVESLY, whose disinterested friendship for me deserves my best returns of affection and esteem; who not only cheerfully complied with the first proposal of a design in favour of his *Assistant*, but hath encouraged

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couraged it himself by his attendance on the Lecture, and by shewing the most entire satisfaction in all the honourable circumstances of it; as well as by vindicating the design of it, whenever he judged it expedient or necessary; an abundant proof that he is not governed by private interest, and that he doth not look on *his Assistant* in any other light, than as one whom he values and esteems as *his Brother and Friend*.

The thorough knowledge I had of his excellent temper, rendered the call of the Church in the *Old Fury*, the more acceptable and pleasing. The being joined to a man of his extensive charity and goodness, and called to publick service in a Church, that abhors all imposition upon conscience, and the inquisitory methods that have been sometimes made use of, to draw out mens sentiments as to matters of mere speculation, I place amongst the happier circumstances of my

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my life. The many instances of friendship I have already received from them, gives me assurance they will be well pleased to see me in a capacity of being serviceable to others besides themselves, and as chearfully assist me by their prayers and good wishes, as they do many of them by their fresh contributions in my behalf.

I am persuaded that no unprejudiced person can be an enemy to the avowed design of this Lecture, how unfit soever they may apprehend I am to execute it. I can assure the world, that you who were concerned in beginning and supporting it, had no other view than that I ever heard of, than to have the principles of religion fairly represented, and the evidence and proofs of revelation stated in their proper light, that your belief of Christianity might be firm and rational, and your obedience to it more regular and constant.

For this reason I judged it necessary

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fary to begin with the great principles of natural religion, which is the only foundation upon which revelation can be supported, and which must be understood before any man is capable of judging either of the nature or evidence of Christianity; and I am persuaded, that 'tis to the want of a due knowledge of the first principles of all religion, those mistakes about the Christian are owing, that have obscured the simplicity of it, and prejudiced many against entertaining and believing it.

'Tis with me therefore an objection of no weight, as I am apt to think 'twill be none with you, that to preach about natural religion, is not to preach Christ. I hope those who make it are wiser than to imagine, that natural religion is not part of the religion of Christ. If it be not, 'tis scarce worth while to enquire at all what his religion is. If it be, then the preaching natural religion is preach-
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ing Christ; and you will think it enough, that I represent to you the principles of his religion, tho' I am not perpetually repeating his name, or insisting upon other favourite doctrines, which have as little foundation in the gospel of Christ, as in the reason of things; as if it were indeed any excellency, that a man must resign his understanding, and renounce his reason in order to believe the most reasonable institution.

You, *Gentlemen*, will not imagine that I desire any such converts to Christianity. The representing it in such a light is to expose it to the contempt and insults of unbelievers, who will not easily be brought to like any religion merely because 'tis irrational and mysterious, but will insist upon it, that the religion of Christ must be understood before it can or ought to be believed, and that it must be proved to be a consistent and rational religion,

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ligion, before they can be under any obligation to receive it.

And indeed why should not every man insist upon these things? The only consequence that I can imagine can flow from it is, not that the cause of Christianity will suffer, which will stand the test of the most impartial enquiry, but that the rigid directors of the faith and consciences of men will lose their authority, and human schemes and creeds, that have been set up in the room of Christianity, will fall into the contempt they so justly deserve.

I persuade myself you wish that these consequences may every day gain ground; 'tis my hearty prayer, I assure you, to *the Father of lights*, and *the God of truth*, that all human authority in matters of faith may come to a full end, and that every one who hath reason to direct him, and a soul to save, may be his own judge

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judge in every thing that concerns his eternal welfare, without any prevailing regard to the dictates of fallible men, or fear of their peevish and impotent censures.

These things have been long of no manner of weight with me, and it shall be part of my business in the future course of the Lecture, to persuade you to pay as little regard to them as I do myself. You will know how to value those, who are impartial enquirers after truth, and honestly endeavour to represent the truth to you; and 'tis your esteem for me upon this foundation only that I desire or expect; being fully contented with the office of being an *helper of your joy*, without the vain and unchristian pretence of *having dominion over your faith*.

It is no small pleasure to me, that to you, *Gentlemen*, I can speak about matters of religion, with all the freedom

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dom I can wish. I hope I shall use my liberty without giving any just cause of offence; tho' no fear of censure, or sinking interest shall keep me silent, where I apprehend the cause of God, and the Credit of Christianity is concerned.

As I don't expect to be believed in any thing, any farther than as I prove what I assert by solid reason and argument, I doubt not but you will give me an impartial hearing, and suffer no prejudices to prevent the access of truth to your mind. If I should prove the happy instrument of reclaiming any, and confirming others in the faith and practice of the Gospel, I shall esteem it the honour, and feel it the daily pleasure of my life.

I conclude with my most fervent wishes to the Author of all good, that you may encrease in all the blessings of time, that you may be rich towards God, and at last inherit the re-
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wards of glory; and with assuring you, that I take a much greater pleasure in the supports and acceptance I have unexpectedly met with from so large and flourishing a society, than I could have done from a much larger provision in the publick Establishment, where, besides a regard to principle, the kindness would have been less honourable to me, and my prospect of usefulness in some respects less extensive.

I am,

GENTLEMEN,

your most obliged,

affectionate and

humble Servant,

Bath, May
4, 1728.

S. CHANDLER.

TO THE
READER.

THE many bold attempts of late years, to destroy the foundations of all religion, and the defiance and contempt that has been offer'd particularly to Christianity, seem to be design'd by the wise providence of God, to direct Christians to consider and review their principles and their conduct.

It wou'd then easily appear, that some lamentable corruptions among themselves, and unnatural contentions and divisions, have given the enemies of Christ and his religion the great encouragement to their impious undertakings, which yet have the natural and good effect, to awaken and alarm the lovers of truth and godliness to serious counsels, and all proper endeavours to maintain and defend their principles,

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principles, and manifest the evidences that have satisfied their minds, and are fit to convince and persuade sober and thoughtful persons, and to enable the lovers of truth to triumph over subtlety and sophistry, which are indeed the utmost power of the adversary.

Thus some worthy persons, who had well observ'd the talents and capacity, as well as zeal and affection of my dear Friend and Brother, for the defence of the Cause of Religion, and especially of Christianity, which is the perfection and establishment of it by a sure revelation from Heaven, made an happy motion to engage him in that Lecture, during the winter-season; which has produced a course of Sermons, to lay the solid and unchangeable foundations of all true religion, which I have attended with great pleasure and satisfaction, which had the respect of a great audience, and the approbation of those much more judicious

xvi The P R E F A C E.

judicious than I can think myself, and wou'd be I doubt not a great benefit to many, were they to appear, with this excellent concluding discourse.

However, this conclusion of the whole matter, the sum of all religion, the chief end and truest glory of it, the doing the commandments of God and Christ, was so happily represented and urged, that many were importunate and not to be denied the publication of this discourse.

Here is no separate and party view in the discourse, 'tis the common concern and interest of all men, to know and practise what is right and good. 'Tis the right and duty of all to enquire after truth, and the way to all the happiness that God has made them capable of.

*It is not a just matter of complaint or reproach, if, when the main fortrefs of Christianity is assaulted, the suburbs, that have been built in times of security and peace, for the interest
and*

The P R E F A C E. xvii

and humour of private persons, be demolish'd and remov'd. I have good reason to be assur'd, that it is not any hatred or contempt of any parties or persons among Christians, on account of their different apprehension or modes of expressing them; but a pure zeal for truth and the honour and defence of the Christian religion, that all authority and forms but those of Christ and his Apostles are so earnestly disclaimed and renounced.

Indeed, what generous mind can see the most glorious and important cause weaken'd and injur'd, merely to support the authority and interest of private persons or some particular society? or see men of known and approv'd loyalty and fidelity to their King and Country, to Christ and his Religion, disfranchis'd of their privileges and common liberties by the by-laws of some particular Corporation or Company.

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The inquisitive reader will here find all encouragements to examine impartially and soberly into all the great points of natural religion and all the pretensions of the Christian religion to divine authority and revelation; and the Christian is urged with all possible affection and solemnity to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour, he is warned against all the abuses of knowledge and pretensions to liberty, and must either set himself in earnest to prove his faith and love by a suitable practice, or stand condemn'd of slighting and forgetting some of the most pathetick entreaties and forcible words that he can have from the pulpit or the press. I cannot but hope that the divine blessing will cause some good fruit of this discourse to abide on them that heard it, and to spring up in those that peruse it, and that none under such instructions will deceive themselves, and glory either in knowledge or liberty, without the improvement of them

The PREFACE. XIX

them to sanctify and cleanse their hearts, and purify their souls in obeying the truth, since it is hereby only that we do know that we know Christ if we keep his commandments. 1 John II.

3, 4.

May that worthy Society that have so happily engaged and honourably supported my dear Friend and Brother in so important a service, reap the fruits of it in growing knowledge, confirmed grace, shining and exemplary virtue, joyful hopes, and a full maturity and meetness for the blessed world above.

May the health and vigour of one so well dispos'd to serve Christ in the gospel-ministry, who has under many difficulties and discouragements maintain'd his integrity, and exerted himself in the glorious Cause of Pure Religion and Christian Liberty, be continued and encreased for the good of many, and to supply the defects, and assist the sincere endeavours of one truly
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ly sensible how unequal and insufficient he is to the great charge devolved on him. Wherein may every serious reader join their fervent prayers, with him whose heart's desire and prayer it is, that they may be saved, and obtain the happiness of those that know the will and imitate the example and do the commandments of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

THO. LEAVESLY.

KNOWLEDGE and PRACTICE
necessary to Happiness.

JOHN XIII. 17.

*If ye know these things, happy are
ye if ye do them.*

Knowledge and practice are both of them essentially necessary to the character of a Christian. Without the former, there can be no rational regular virtue ; without the latter, knowledge becomes destitute of its proper influence and worth : and therefore it is what every man owes to himself, first to endeavour after the genuine principles of truth, and then to improve the things he understands to the purposes of an holy virtuous life ; since that knowledge only is valuable in itself, or can be of any real service to men, that betters their tempers, and reforms their lives ; that tends to adorn and perfect their natures, and

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to

2 *Knowledge and Practice*

to prepare them for that state of happiness, which the Great Creator hath made them capable of enjoying.

In the course of this lecture, in which by your desire I engaged, I have been endeavouring to establish you in the belief of the noblest and most important principles of religion. I have shewn you, that there is a Being strictly and properly eternal, which had never any beginning of his existence, that this Being exists by an absolute necessity of his nature ; that therefore the only reason of his existence is from himself, *viz.* the possession of all possible perfection ; that this eternal Being is not material, or matter digested into any particular form or system, but spiritual and immaterial ; that he is a vital, self-conscious active Being, endowed with the most perfect liberty, infinitely wise and powerful and good ; that he is Creator of the universe, by whom the original mass was called into being, and by whose words the worlds were framed, or the present order and system of things was contrived and established.

From hence we argued the reality and necessity of a providence, or that there is a continued exertion of the power of the first cause, in supporting and preserving the essences of things, and the several properties that belong to their particular natures ; and in wisely over-ruling and governing them, according to the respective powers and faculties he hath imparted

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imparted to them. I have shewn you, that this principle is not only certain in itself, and necessarily consequent from the being and perfections of a God, but infinitely desirable by all wise and considerate men, who have any regard for the welfare and peace of societies, the satisfaction and security of their present beings, or their happiness in a future better state; as well as infinitely preferable to the atheistic schemes of fatality and chance; by the former of which, all virtue and vice are absolutely confounded, the necessity, advantage and justice of human government and laws destroyed, and man degraded into mere matter and mechanism; by the latter, the affairs of the universe left in a state of the utmost confusion and disorder, and the lives, possessions and pleasures of men rendered absolutely uncertain and precarious.

From these grand principles flow all the duties of natural religion, which, as being founded in the nature and reason of things, are unalterably the same, and of perpetual and universal obligation, and which therefore every particular scheme of religion, that hath God for its author, must contain and inculcate. From hence I took occasion to represent to you, how exact an agreement there is between natural and revealed religion, or between the religion of true natural reason and the gospel, in that the grand principles of both are entirely the same, such as the belief

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of a God, and a providence, and of God's being a rewarder of them that diligently seek him; because the same duties are enjoined and enforced by each of them, such as the worship of God in spirit and in truth, the praising him for his mercies, the addressing him by fervent supplications for the mercies we want, confidence in his power and goodness, and submission to his will; justice and charity towards men, or that whatsoever things are honourable, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous and praise-worthy, we should think of them, and constantly do them; and finally, the due regulation and government of our passions and affections: The great motives also to enforce the practice of these duties are the same in natural and revealed religion, such as the reasonableness of virtue in itself; its necessity to make societies and individuals happy, a becoming regard to the divine authority and perfections, a due care to avoid the displeasure of God, and to secure his approbation; the hopes of his assistance in well-doing, and of being accepted and rewarded by him hereafter for our obedience to his will. And whatever there is peculiar to the Christian Revelation, I have in a general view shewn you, that it is perfectly consistent with the highest reason, agreeable to our best notions of the divine attributes, and is designed to strengthen the motives of natural religion, and to render more
secure

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secure the practice of true virtue, and the happiness of men; and that therefore every sober *Deist*, who believes the being and perfections of God, and the obligations to moral virtue, is by his own principles led highly to esteem and heartily to believe the Christian Revelation.

These are the main things I have been representing to you in the course of this lecture, and if I have set them before you in their proper light, and supported them with such arguments as have convinced your judgments of the truth and importance of them, *if ye know* and believe them, *happy* will you be *if you do them*, or live suitably to the influence of them.

You will easily perceive, that by these discourses I have paved my way for treating more particularly of the principles and doctrines of revelation, to which I shall confine myself, if God preserve my life to another season. I am indeed very sensible, that such subjects as I have insisted on, are not very agreeable to every taste; especially to theirs who think Christianity glorious only as mysterious, and that 'tis the main excellency of a Christian to believe heartily what is incapable of being ever understood; and who therefore can relish no discourses, that are not upon abstruse and metaphysical questions, and shaped according to some certain systems, which, *as to words and things,*

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things, are as tenaciously maintained, as tho' they were the *pure and undefiled religion* of Christ himself; I shou'd rather say, as tho' they were preferable to the religion of his gospel: since if a man professes never so seriously to believe this, it will not be thought sufficient to his obtaining the character of a good orthodox Christian, unless he believes a great deal more, or at least professes to believe in *certain hard technical words*, which are the proper marks of the soundness of his judgment, and are to distinguish him from all other sorts of Christians whatsoever.

As for myself, I can patiently bear the censures of such men, and therefore openly declare, that I pay reverence to no words but those of God in the sacred writings, nor to any names as authorities in matters of faith but those of Christ and his apostles; and that the true reason why I esteem and believe Christianity is not, because 'tis a mysterious and unintelligible institution, but because 'tis a plain religion, and easy to be understood. Whatever indeed can be proved to be a genuine doctrine of the great *Author and Finisher of my faith*, or of those who wrote by the inspiration of his Spirit, I reckon myself obliged for that reason to believe, as far as I can understand it, and trust in God that I shall never willingly resist the evidence of truth: And as I can with the greatest sincerity declare, that in the course of this lecture
I have

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I have had no other view, than to support the main principles of religion, and to lead you to, and confirm you in the belief of Christianity upon a solid rational foundation, I am abundantly content, how much soever our design hath been censured and reproached by some who should know better, and by others whose ignorance and bigotry is their excuse, with the hopes that I have approved myself to God and my own conscience, and that I have been acceptable to you, who have favoured me with your attendance; whom to serve in your most valuable interests, I shall ever esteem my honour, as it will be my great happiness and pleasure.

The practice of religion undoubtedly can never be supported but by real knowledge, nor the belief of Christianity be rational or just, unless such belief be the fruit of evidence and conviction. This is the first thing intimated by our Saviour in my text. *If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them*, which words plainly suppose that knowledge is absolutely necessary to practice; that the nature of true religion must be first understood, before the end and design of it can be complied with. And of consequence men must take the proper measures to obtain this knowledge: they must enquire what the certain and genuine principles of religion are, what the duties that necessarily result from them, and what are the proper rational motives to a suitable behaviour.

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behaviour. The reasonable powers of mankind, if impartially used, will lead them to just and certain conclusions in these things; by which conclusions they must, and will be abundantly able to judge of all doctrines that are recommended to their belief by any persons, whether they pretend to revelation, or not. For either the pretences of all in general, who set up for instructors of others, must be received and believed, or there must be some certain rules whereby we must judge, whether such pretences are justly supported or not. If the latter be granted, as I suppose it will, these rules must not be drawn from any thing peculiar to such claims, or pretended revelations; since whether they are true or false, they will undoubtedly endeavour to secure their own reputation and authority; but must be prior to, and independent of them, and founded in the reason and nature of things.

Of consequence if we would be rational Christians, as to our belief, we must impartially examine, whether Christianity as a revelation from God is supported by proper evidence: We must compare its descriptions of God and his perfections, its account and system of moral duties, and its motives and encouragements to virtue and piety, with those natural and certain notices of God and goodness, which our reason leads us to, and examine impartially what is that external evidence,

dence, by which it supports its claim to be a religion from God. And if we are convinced from the nature and internal constitution of Christianity, and the clearness and certainty of the outward evidence that attends it, that it hath God for its author; then the belief and reception of it will be rational and virtuous, and we shall be led by our own convictions to a suitable practice. For the more thoroughly men understand the nature and design of it, and the more firmly they are persuaded that it is a religion from God, the more steady, lasting and uniform will their obedience to it be; of greater worth and value in itself, and the more pleasing to that God, who requires only a reasonable service from us.

Whereas if we do not understand the full evidence there is for the truth of Christianity, if we take up our notions of it upon trust, or if our knowledge of its main principles be defective; the natural consequence is, either that we shall be immoral in our practice, or that our obedience will be but partial, or that in time we shall throw off the belief of the Christian religion, and run into *Deism*; or downright *Atheism*. For what is there that can influence any man to that universal piety and virtue which the gospel recommends, but an hearty rational conviction, that it is a revelation from God, and that therefore every duty is enforced by the divine au-

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thority.

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thority. A steady virtue is the natural produce of a rational faith; but if the proofs of Christianity be not known, our assent to the truth of it must be both unreasonable and weak; and if our belief be uncertain and wavering, it can never have power sufficient, habitually to controul men's sinful passions, or to engage them in a regular discharge of those duties, which are not to be practised without great resolution, difficulty and labour.

Or if men have taken up their notions of Christianity from others, without having ever taken the pains to compare the doctrines they have been taught with the principles of natural religion, or their own notions of it which they have imbibed, with the plain declarations of the gospel of Christ; it is, I think, no wonder, that instead of believing real Christianity, they should entertain sentiments that are really dishonourable to it, and destructive of it, or that they should be deficient in the practice of some of the most excellent virtues it recommends to us; that they should place the whole of it in the belief of some favourite opinions, expect to be justified in a method that absolutely destroys the value, efficacy and necessity of moral virtue; and that they should censure and condemn others, as out of God's favour, and unfit for Christian communion, who see reason to differ from them. For as men, who have no other foundation on which to raise their reputation and character,

rafter, but the dominion they claim over the faith and consciences of others, will be sure to represent all the doctrines they teach as sacred and of the highest importance, and as necessary to be believed in order to salvation, as the zealots in all parties have ever done; so an implicate faith in their decisions naturally leads to error in judgment; and such mistakes in the essentials of religion, when they are esteemed as the doctrines of God, as naturally produce degrees of vice in the behaviour. And it is an observation, that I believe every thoughtful man must have made, that such who have never honestly and impartially examined the nature of Christianity, and have understood the least of it; have been most forward and warm to censure and condemn others, as well as sadly defective in their observance of the rules of justice in their commerce and dealings with others; from a mistaken opinion, that an orthodox belief is the great command of the gospel, and will atone and compensate for an immoral and vicious conduct.

But this is not all; for I apprehend that the entertaining principles as Christian doctrines by an implicate faith, or upon the authority of others, without carefully examining into the truth of them our selves; tends very much, and hath actually led many to downright infidelity. They have been brought up in a set of notions, which they have entertained as the great essentials of Christianity;

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nity; their teachers have warmly pressed the belief of them; they have after their way endeavoured to prove them, by some certain sounds and unconnected passages of scripture, and represented the belief of them as necessary to salvation, and all doubts of the truth of them as symptoms of a graceless state and a reprobate mind, and the rejection of them as an apostacy from the Christian faith, and a denial of the Lord that bought them. When afterwards such persons have worn off the prejudices they have laboured under, and more carefully examined into these matters, they find great objections against the notions they have received, and perhaps see that they are so far from being the essential doctrines of any true religion, that they are certain proofs that that religion must be false, which contains and inculcates them. And therefore as they have been taught, as well as apprehended from some mistaken passages of scripture, that these things are the main points of Christianity, for this reason they have entirely rejected the whole of it: I have too much reason to think, that this is the case of many inquisitive men, and therefore our regard for our common Christianity, and the honour and success of it, should keep us from being over-warm and positive in asserting any particular explication of disputable points, to be the essential and fundamental doctrines of the gospel. For tho' such

Such a zeal may be pleasing to a party, and qualify men to be the leaders of it, yet it can never be for the conviction of sober enquirers; who will scarce ever be brought to think, that opinions difficult in themselves, of little or no influence as to practice, and liable to everlasting disputes, can be the main and essential doctrines of a revelation from God, which can only be desirable or valuable, as it is designed for the common instruction and benefit; and as it gives us the plainest directions as to our faith and practice.

To avoid therefore these errors and extremes, I would press on you an impartial examination, and a rational unprejudiced enquiry. Nothing can be more pleasing to the God of truth; it is your privilege and duty as men, and allowed you by the express warrant of revelation, which commands you to *prove all things, and to hold fast that only which you find to be good.* It is necessary to preserve you from a mean dependence on, and servile subjection to others, and to secure the liberty and approbation of your consciences; to your understanding wherein true religion consists, and what it is that God requires of you, in order to your present acceptance and future happiness. Take heed that you be not biassed by any irregular passions and affections, or by any secret love to a vicious course. Lay no stress upon the assertions of weak and fallible men, nor let any
4 authority

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authority influence you but that of God and truth. Let even your belief of Christianity, the noblest improvement of natural religion that ever was, be the effect of honest enquiry and full conviction; and take your notion and account of it, not from any human summaries or descriptions of it, which will ever be as imperfect as the authors of them, but from those authentic and infallible records, the gospel of Christ, and the writings of his apostles. The Son of God, to whom we are accountable for our faith and practice as Christians, will never upbraid us for not submitting our consciences to those, whom he hath never commissioned to exercise dominion over them, nor for our not believing in him before we saw reason to do it, and were convinced of the truth of his holy religion; but will behold with pleasure your diligence in pursuing after truth, and by his good spirit preserve you from all fatal and destructive errors, and lead you into every truth which is necessary to be known in order to salvation. He delights in willing converts, rather than in implicate and hasty believers, and had rather that men should become Christians from conscience and principle, than from education, prejudice and custom. And when mens faith is from judgment and strong conviction, they are then, and only then disciples worthy their great Lord and Master, who, when he was upon earth, submitted himself and his pretensions

pretensions to be tried by the nature of his doctrines, and the wonderful works he performed, and expressly declared of the Jews, amongst whom he preached, that *if ye were blind ye should have no sin*, if ye were incapable of perceiving the evidence I give of my divine mission your unbelief would not be criminal; *but now ye say, We see, therefore your sin remains*, since either they were convinced by his doctrines and miracles, that he was the Messiah, and yet thro' worldly policy rejected him contrary to their convictions; or because their vicious habits and prejudices rendered them incapable of that conviction they would otherwise have received, this was that which made their infidelity so offensive to God, and brought down vengeance and destruction upon their heads. Now if when Christ himself was upon earth, and taught his own religion among men, his hearers had the liberty to examine impartially into the nature and proofs of his pretensions, and judge according to the evidence that was offered them without danger; undoubtedly we have a stronger right to the same liberty, who live at so great a distance of time from the first publication of Christianity, and who can know nothing of the nature or proof of it, without a diligent and careful examination and enquiry.

It is too true, that knowledge may be, and too often is separated from practice, and that
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many think 'tis enough if they believe well, tho' they live ever so ill; tho' one would think, that there can be no other valuable end of knowledge, than the making men truly virtuous and holy, and tho' nothing can be more certain, than that true religion consists not so much in speculation as practice. It is indeed much the easier matter, to attain to some knowledge of the truth, or which is too generally the case, for men to persuade themselves into the belief of some certain principles as true, than to mortify and govern their passions, and lead *sober, righteous and godly lives*, which is the substance of religion, and the great design of the appearance of the grace of God in the gospel. Truths of the greatest importance are plain and obvious enough, and soon found out by common measures of diligence and enquiry, because the reason and consciences of men lead them as naturally to discern them, as any kind of propositions whatsoever; and unless they shut their eyes, and remain in wilful ignorance, they can no more help discerning them, than they can perceiving the light in the midst of day. And when once they are known, they generally make such deep impressions on the mind, as that they are seldom lost and parted with, tho' the proper influence of them is too often prevented. For the practice of true religion is much more difficult, thro' the strength of our appetites and passions, and the bad examples

examples and customs of the evil world we live in, and because it is the service of our entire lives, and therefore requires continued application, watchfulness and care. Hence the generality choose the easier part, and are for commuting with Almighty God, being content with knowing, or imagining that they do know their master's will, without ever being at the pains to do it; and therefore I shall conclude the service of this season, by shewing you, that the true end of all knowledge is practice, and that no man can be acceptable to God merely for his good belief, unless his faith influences him to all the virtues of a Christian life.

And this is abundantly evident from the reason and nature of things, because bare knowledge cannot be either really useful to the person himself that hath it, nor can it render him useful and serviceable to others; and therefore being thus absolutely ineffectual as to every valuable purpose of life, it can never secure him of the divine acceptance and favour.

1. *Mere* knowledge is of no real service to a man's self; it is not the true necessary preparation for real happiness. For if he believes the best system of truths in the whole world, and yet hath not learnt thereby to govern his affections and passions, and to subdue his vicious habits and appetites, he must needs be
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extremely unhappy in his own temper and disposition; true happiness depending on a regular state of the mind, and not upon unactive principles and notions. Pride and anger, hatred and malice and the like, are in their nature uneasy and turbulent passions, and he who is subject to the influence of them, cannot be in a condition to take any solid and lasting pleasure in the review of truth. Yea rather, if at any time he is capable of attending to the consideration of the noblest truths, the uneasiness of his own mind must be doubly increased. For who is there that can seriously reflect on the supreme Being, as possessed of every possible perfection, as absolutely free from every disorder and impotency of mind, and therefore as infinitely happy and blessed; without being highly displeased with himself, when he compares himself with so glorious a Pattern, and thereby discerns how vastly unlike he is, in his own temper, to this most excellent and amiable Being? If to consider God in such a view yields any pleasure to the mind, it must needs create in us the highest pain, when we consider ourselves in a quite different and contrary one. Or who can reflect on the excellent nature and constitution of the Christian religion, which recommends to us forbearance, meekness, charity, love, and all other virtues, by the glorious example of the Son of God; without being

ing concerned and uneasy, to find himself entirely destitute of them, and under the power and influence of those contrary lusts and passions, which both the doctrine and example of Christ, so strongly oblige and persuade him to subdue? Certainly the knowledge and belief of divine truths, attended to, must greatly distress the conscience of a bad man, so far will they ever be from yielding him any solid and lasting satisfaction. For who can take pleasure in beholding the disorders and blemishes of his nature, or love to see himself in a glass, that only discovers to him his own deformities? No. Our principles then only become pleasing and delightful, when by the influence of them we learn to calm, and govern our passions, and are formed by them into such a temper, as renders us capable of chearfully enjoying the blessings of the present world, and the higher happiness of a better.

2. Nor doth mere knowledge render any man useful to others. For of what service to the world can unactive principles be? What doth it signify that a man understands the rules of virtue, or the theory of religion; if he acts contrary to the dictates and precepts of it, or doth not practise those duties of social life which it enjoyns him? If he can give the truest descriptions of God, and of his natural and moral perfections, of what service

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is he to others, if he doth not reverence the one, and imitate the other? If he understands all the branches of the great duties of justice and charity, and is persuaded of the necessity and obligation of them, upon the most solid foundations of reason; what are his acquaintance, his family, or the society he belongs to, the better for all this, if in his own behaviour he is habitually unjust and uncharitable? The happiness of mankind is not to be supported by our mere private opinions, but by the conformity of our practice to the good principles we entertain. And therefore if in some of the more difficult and disputed points of religion, a man is really mistaken, and thro' the weakness of his understanding falls into error; yet if by his belief of plainer matters, he is disposed to beneficence, justice and charity, he is a much better Christian, and in a much safer state, than another who is more sound in the faith, and believes every article aright, and yet is censorious and cruel in his temper, and unrighteous in his dealings with others. The errors of his understanding a man cannot always avoid, nor doth the peace and welfare of societies require that he should; but immorality and vice every man may, and ought to avoid; and if he doth not, the real or imaginary soundness of his faith will not prevent his being punished by God, his future judge, as a worker of iniquity, nor prevent

prevent his being censured by the civil magistrate, as far as he acts contrary to the publick welfare, which the magistrate by his office is obliged to maintain.

From hence it is evident, that mere knowledge or faith can never recommend any man to the divine acceptance and favour, whether his belief is the effect of rational conviction, or whether he hath taken it up by education and chance. In the latter cases undoubtedly the principles any one entertains can be no more pleasing to God, than the colour or fashion of his cloaths, the former of which he owes only to the caprice of his fancy, the other to the custom of the country where he dwells; and to imagine that the supreme wisdom can be in love with men for opinions which they have no other reasons to entertain, is to degrade him beneath the character of a wise man, and to represent him as on a level with the very weakest of men. In the former case, if our principles are the fruit of diligent enquiry and impartial search, yet 'tis evident that the virtue of it consists, not in the believing what we are convinced is true, but in the care we have taken to inform our judgments, and attain to the knowledge of truth. For when we are once convinced of the truth of any proposition, our assent to it as true is unavoidable and necessary; and of consequence there can be no more
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virtue in such an assent after full conviction, than there is in seeing the sun at noon-day, when our eyes are open to receive the rays of it. No. That which renders our faith acceptable to God, as such, or as separated from practice, and the proper influence of it, is the care we have taken in our enquiries after truth, and a suitable disposition of mind in us, to receive and submit to the evidence of it.

Now supposing even this to be the case, that a man's principles are all of them the result of impartial enquiry, and the fruit of full conviction, which is the strongest and most favourable view in which I can place this matter; yet can it be possible that without a suitable practice they can recommend him to the divine acceptance and favour? If they can, it will then follow, either that true religion consists entirely in theory and speculation, or that a man may be saved without any religion at all. But both of these suppositions are absolutely contrary, not only to the plainest declarations of the Christian revelation, but to the common sense and reason of mankind. For reason evidently teaches us, that knowledge or faith is not properly religion, but ought always to be considered as the *grand* helps and necessary means to promote the practice of it: It doth not consist so much in knowing that God is, and that he is an infinitely wise and good and just and powerful
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ful Being, the Creator, Preserver and Governour of the world, but in our adoring and loving and praising him as such; in owning our dependance on him, and submitting ourselves to his will, and in being careful to secure his favour, by a chearful and universal obedience to his commands. Much less doth it consist in our believing ourselves elected and chosen from eternity to salvation, that Christ died for us exclusive of others, or in our applying to ourselves the benefits of salvation, unless by virtue and piety we labour to make our *calling and election sure*; unless we *die unto sin*, under the influence of this belief, that Christ died for us, and lead those holy lives, which is our immediate and only title thro' Christ, to the benefits of redemption purchased by him.

Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father, is to visit the fatherless and widow, and to keep himself unspotted from the world; it is to be beneficent, just and good, and to abstain from the pollutions of the world thro' lust. It consists in being *perfect as God is perfect*; in maintaining that regular state of our passions and affections, and in exercising those holy and virtuous dispositions of mind, which will cause us to resemble the most perfect Being, and in imitating his works of justice and charity as far as we are capable. This is the description of true religion from reason
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and revelation, and otherwise to represent it is to adulterate and abuse it. And therefore unless a man can be saved without any religion at all, he cannot be saved by his knowledge or faith unless it produce the genuine fruits of righteousness. And if he who pretends to be the most orthodox believer, and to have the soundest notions in matters of religion, should prove at last a wicked man in practice, he will have as little claim to the mercy and acceptance of God, from the principles of revealed religion, as he hath from natural; which expressly declares, that *every one who works righteousness and fears God, is in all nations accepted of him*, and that *to those who are contentious, and obey not the truth, but obey unrighteousness, God will render indignation and wrath, because not the hearers of the law, not those who know what the law requires to be believed and practised, but the doers of the law only shall be justified*.

Yea, I will venture to go farther on this head, and to affirm that knowledge and faith, unless they are productive of a suitable practice, will be so far from recommending any one to the divine mercy and favour, that from every notion we can form of the divine wisdom and justice, either from reason or revelation, they must expose him to a severer judgment and vengeance. For *to whomsoever*
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much is given, of them much will be required, is a maxim of revelation, that impartial reason justifies the truth of; and therefore if there be any *servant that knows his Lord's will, and prepares not himself, neither doth according to it,* he shall, as he deserves, be *beaten with many stripes.* What can be more evident from these two passages, than that God expects that our virtue and piety should be in proportion to our knowledge; and that to understand his will, without preparing ourselves to practise it, will expose us to an aggravated punishment. And how just and reasonable is it that it should be so? If indeed there are any, who either for want of capacity to enquire, or of a divine revelation to inform them, are ignorant of some part of the divine will, there is reason to think and hope, from the equity of the divine government, that proportionably lesser virtue in practice will be required of them; since the best of beings cannot in reason expect more from men, than they are capable of performing; or that they should practise somewhat as a duty, of which they have no knowledge or information. But if they profess to know the will of God, if they glory in this, that their belief is more sound, and their principles more conformable to gospel truths than those of others; and yet if after such a profession, and in opposition to such a faith, they should be immoral and

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vicious in their behaviour, insolent and proud, censorious and uncharitable, habitually intemperate, or unjust and unrighteous in their dealings with others; is not such an opposition in principle and practice exceedingly criminal in itself, and of consequence must it not be highly offensive to God, the just and universal Judge? Certainly it must be owned that the knowledge of God's will is a very great advantage and help to the doing of it. He who hath his duty plainly represented to him, and understands the strong and powerful motives that are set before him, with the promised aids to enable him to discharge it, can want no farther assistance. Every deviation from it must be his fault; and in proportion to his advantages of knowledge and help, just so much must that fault be aggravated, in the nature of things, and in the sight of God; and in proportion to the aggravation of every man's sins, such will be the recompence he must expect to receive from a righteous and impartial God. Such a one's boasted knowledge of the truth will be his future condemnation, and make that condemnation much more heavy and severe.

And this is the impression that I would endeavour to fix on your minds, and leave with you at the conclusion of my service amongst you for this season. If your attendance on this lecture hath been as profitable to your selves, as it hath been pleasing to me,

we have great reason to be thankful to God; you for having been recalled to, or confirmed in your principles as Christians, I for having been honoured by divine providence to be the instrument of so good a work. If I know myself, and have any prevailing desire, it is to serve the interest of the glorious gospel of the Redeemer, whose religion, as contained in the sacred writings, I heartily reverence and believe; being fully persuaded, after the most unprejudiced examination I am capable of making, that it is a religion every way worthy of God, and calculated in every part of it to render men happy, throughout the whole course of their existence. This profession will, I am assured, satisfy you, that I can never willingly oppose any of the genuine maxims of Christianity; and with this I shall be very easy under the censures of those who think their faith will excuse their immoralities, and who have no better way to defend their own principles than by spreading an evil report of those who differ from them. For my own part, as I was never designed or fitted to be the judge of men's future state, I think it my duty as a Christian to leave every man to God, to whom he stands or falls; and do not understand that I have any right, from nature or the gospel to censure any thing, but plain insincerity or vice. And therefore instead of condemning any sober men for their princ-

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ples, I have contented myself with representing to you the grand principle of natural religion in the best view I was capable of, and shewing you the exact and entire harmony and agreement that there is between it and revealed ; that I might persuade those of you, if any such there be among you, who doubt of the truth of the Christian revelation, and yet believe the being, perfections and providence of God, and own the obligations to moral virtue and piety ; to examine impartially the religion of Christ by these rules and notions, before you are determined to reject the belief of it ; and that I might shew to you, who firmly believe the gospel revelation, that your faith as Christians is truly rational, and supported by the same principles of truth, that natural religion itself is.

And therefore were I now to address myself to a thoughtful Deist, or a professed Believer, my exhortation would be much the same, that your knowledge should be productive of a suitable practice. The Deist is by his own principles obliged to honour and fear and adore the Eternal Father and Cause of all things ; to praise him for all the mercies he receives from him, and to pray to him for his continued favour and blessing ; steadily to practise all the virtues of a good life, and carefully to abstain from every thing that is immoral or vicious in his behaviour, from the hope, tho'
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I must add the uncertain hope, of a future recompence of his obedience from God. The Christian also is under the very same obligations, tho from much nobler motives, and an absolutely certain promise and prospect of an eternal glorious reward. He hath every encouragement and help that his soul can desire, or his passions need, to engage him to a regular virtue and piety: He hath before him the clearest revelation of the divine will, the promise of divine assistance, the aid of the most perfect example, and the sure views of the most durable and satisfying happiness, to excite and influence him. And on the other hand, there are the most awful threatenings, that the heart of man can form any notion of, or his fears imagine, to be a constant guard and check upon his actions. Good God! That under such views, and with such apprehensions, there should be any single person, professing himself a Christian, that should dare to indulge habitually to any of the vices that are forbidden him; who can venture to live without daily acknowledging his dependence on God, to whom he is beholden for the blessings of this life, and the better prospects of another; that can allow himself to be uncharitable and unjust, and suffer himself to be governed by vicious habits and passions, when he knows and believes that for all these things God will bring him into judgment; and that
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nothing less than the loss of his immortal soul, and the forfeiture of heaven and its eternal glory, will be the certain consequences of his impenitency in vice.

If then you believe the principles that I have been supporting, if you are Christians upon rational conviction and by the force of evidence, bear with me if I beseech you by the mercies of God in Christ Jesus, by all the regards you bear to your own highest and best interest, by your desires to avoid everlasting misery, and by your hopes of obtaining eternal life, to *adorn the doctrine of God your Saviour*, by living *blameless and harmless and without rebuke, in the midst of an evil and perverse generation*, as becomes the sons of God, and the heirs and expectants of everlasting glory. I would not that any of you should miss of the promised reward; that you, who are made for the enjoyment of God, and the society of his blessed angels, should hereafter be excluded from his blissful presence, and condemned to spend your eternity with those miserable spirits, who are now *locked up under chains of darkness, and reserved to the judgment of the great day*. No. Rather lift up your eyes to the blessed mansions above. See how wide the gates of heaven stand open for your reception. Nothing obstructs your entrance there, but your refusal to enter. And will you, for the sake of the pleasures of sin,
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which are but for a moment, prevent your access to those happy abodes, and thus become principals in your own destruction? God forbid. Remember therefore, as ever you would reach them, that there is but one way that leads to them, and that is the path of piety and virtue; a path that abounds with the most solid pleasures, honoured by the steps of the Son of God, made secure by his merits, and which thro' his intercession will infallibly lead you to eternal happiness and glory.

That my service among you may promote this blessed end, is my hearty desire, and will be my fervent prayer to God, to whose almighty blessing I recommend you, who is willing to assist all your virtuous endeavours, and who will now accept, and hereafter plenteously reward them.

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